Intelligence Information Report

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COUNTRY South Vietnam

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SUBJECT: South Vietnamese Liberation Army Enemy Proselyting Office Handling of Prisoners of War

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Summary: The Enemy Proselyting Office of the South Vietnamese Liberation Army (SVNLA) Political Staff has the primary responsibility for the administration, indoctrination and interrogation of foreign military and civilian prisoners as well as for Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) captured personnel. It had no jurisdiction over captured VC deserters, captured Vietnamese civilians or U.S./Allied/ARVN deserters who voluntarily rally directly to VC organizations.

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The Enemy Proselyting Office between April 1968 and April 1970 had three administrative Prisoner of War (POW) units which supervised about seven POW camps for U.S./foreign military and civilian POWs, and at least three POW camps for ARVN personnel. In April 1970, the POW administrative units and their subordinate POW camps were reorganized and combined into at least three POW camps for U.S./foreign personnel and at least one for ARVN personnel. Heavy emphasis was placed on the persuasive indoctrination of all POWs under its jurisdiction. Indoctrination and interrogation results were sent to Hanoi, to the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) Military Proselyting Section, and to SVNLA campaign planners in support of projected combat operations. The Enemy Proselyting Office Policy Section supervised all detention facilities, maintained a central registry of all POWs under its jurisdiction, recommended and arranged POW release ceremonies, approved the recruitment of ARVN POWs into the SVNLA, as well as implementing policies on the handling and treatment of POWs and issuing guidance instructions to VC Military Region- and subregion-level enemy proselyting organizations. As of 2 April 1970, at least sixteen U.S. POWs and one captured U.S. deserter were being detained in subordinate Enemy Proselyting Office detention facilities. End Summary.

1. The Enemy Proselyting Office (Phong Dich Van (PDV)) of the South Vietnamese Liberation Army (SVNLA) Headquarters, Political Staff was charged with the primary responsibility for the administration, indoctrination and interrogation of foreign military and civilian prisoners as well as for Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) captured personnel. The PDV was also responsible for compiling information for draft propaganda leaflets, arranging prisoner of war (POW) release ceremonies, maintaining central POW record logs, conducting research on the psychological, moral and ideological beliefs of captured enemy personnel (excluding captured Vietnamese civilians) and drafting enemy proselyting programs which were to be used during combat situations against enemy military personnel. All captured foreign civilian personnel were categorized as enemy espionage agents and were detained and treated as captured foreign military personnel. The PDV between April 1968 and April 1970 administered at least seven detention camps for captured U.S. and other foreign military and civilian POWs and at least three other detention camps for ARVN POWs. The PDV did not have any responsibility for detained VC personnel. Such detainees were under the jurisdiction of the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) Security Section, which was also responsible for detaining captured civilian Vietnamese and Government of Vietnam (GVN) civil servants, who were classified as GVN espionage agents and traitors to the Vietnamese people. PDV POWs were made available for interrogations and debriefings conducted by the COSVN Military/Troop Proselyting Section and the Security Protection Office (Phong Bao Ve) of the SVNLA Headquarters Political Staff. Both sources stated specifically that neither the COSVN Security Section nor the Military Intelligence Office (MIO) of the SVNLA Military Staff was involved in the interrogation of POWs at PDV detention facilities. However, the MIO was normally informed of the capture of all U.S./foreign military and civilian personnel, according to Source Nguyen Thanh L i n h, and could, upon request, dispatch its own qualified personnel to interrogate such prisoners who were being detained by the capturing unit. In the case of VC Subregion 1 (SR-1), the SR-1 Political Office Enemy Proselyting Section was charged with the primary responsibility of immediately interrogating POWs in the field for perishable tactical military information. Such information was given directly to the local VC military unit commander for immediate use against the enemy.

2. Prior to the Allied military incursion into Cambodia in May 1970, the Headquarters of the PDV was located in the Bridge 48 area within the COSVN/SVNLA Headquarters complex in the Fishhook area of Cambodia. The PDV Headquarters was composed of six major subordinate

elements: Command Group, Policy Section (Ban Chinh Sach), Propaganda Section (Ban Tuyen Truyen), Cadre Section (Ban Can Bo), Enemy Situation Section (Ban Dich Tinh), and the In-Combat Proselyting Section (Ban Dich Van Trong Chien Dau). A PDV Reception Station was located in an unknown area approximately a one-hour walk southeast in GVN Phu Khuong District, Tay Ninh Province.

3. The PDV Headquarters Command Group was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Ngo Dac Tri, aka Le Tri, aka Muoi Tri, aka Muoi Tri, and his two deputies, Majors Pham Ba Thanh, aka Ba Thanh, and Bui Thanh Ngon, aka Ba Ngon. One English-speaking interpreter named (fnu) Hoa was permanently assigned to the Command Group. The PDV Headquarters was still designated J2 with letter box number 86,300/YK as of April 1970. About 50 personnel were assigned to the PDV Headquarters, with about 300 personnel at subordinate PDV detention facilities.

4. The PDV Policy Section was the most important PDV element. The Policy Section was responsible for supervising the administration of subordinate PDV detention facilities, interrogating and indoctrinating POWs and deserters, recommending POWs for release and arranging POW release ceremonies, maintaining a central registry of POWs and deserters processed through and/or detained by the PDV, as well as implementing policies on the treatment and handling of POWs and deserters and issuing guidance, instructions to Military Region and subregion-level Political Cadre/Enemy Proselyting Sections within the COSVN geographical area of jurisdiction. The responsibilities and functions of this section were almost identical with those of the Ministry of Defense Enemy Proselyting Department Policy Office in NVN. (b3 [redacted] dated 10 August 1970 for further details on the Enemy Proselyting Department Policy Office in NVN.) The Chief of the PDV Policy Section was Major Tran Van Luc, aka Nam Luc. At least five other personnel were in this section.

5. The Policy Section directly supervised through an administrative units between April 1968 and 2 April 1970, when these units underwent a major reorganization. The three units were designated Inter-Unit A, B and C.

A. Inter-Unit A: established about May 1968 in the Cut Spring area about 12 kilometers southeast of Katum, Phu Khuong District, Tay Ninh Province. In October 1969, the Cut Spring area was bombed by B-52's; however, Inter-Unit A suffered no casualties and relocated in the Phum Trapcang Phlos/Phum Dar area (vicinity XT203977) of Cambodia, about four kilometers south of National Route 7. The Inter-Unit A Headquarters was composed of 25 personnel headed by Senior Captain Le Hong Bien, aka Hai Bien. Inter-Unit A supervised four POW detention camps and one POW escort unit.

(1) Unit 23A (designated Unit 23 prior to April 1968): established pre-Tet 1968 as an ARVN enlisted and NCO POW detention camp. In April 1969, Unit 23A was relieved of its POW detention function and became purely a POW escort unit for ARVN prisoners, picking up ARVN POWs from Rear Services Group 82 and Commo/Liaison Station V15. Between April 1969 and April 1970, Unit 23A picked up and escorted only ten ARVN POWs who were detained for interrogation by the PDV Headquarters elements before being delivered to Inter-Unit B for permanent detention and/or later release. In May 1968, Unit 23A picked up and detained 25 ARVN enlisted POWs who were all released in August/September 1968; 28 ARVN enlisted POWs in December 1968, who were all released in February 1969; 12 in February 1969, eight of whom were

released in March 1969 and four of whom were transferred to Inter-Unit B. One U.S. POW, who was picked up in June 1968, was turned over to Unit 2A for detention, and one ARVN lieutenant, (fnu) X u a n, was turned over to Unit 3A for detention. Unit strength: 25 personnel.

(2) Unit 1A (designated Unit A20 prior to April 1966): Unit 1A was the only PDV detention facility in existence prior to January 1968 for both ARVN/Allied military and civilian POWs. After April 1969, Unit 1A was no longer responsible for ARVN POWs. Unit 1A was located in the Bo Tuc area in Binh Long Province. Unit strength: 25 personnel.

(3) Unit 2A (known as Unit 21 prior to April 1968): established pre-Tet 1968 as a detention facility for foreign military and civilian POWs. As of 2 April 1970, about seven or eight U.S. POWs were detained in this camp. Unit strength: 25 personnel. In January 1969, three U.S. POWs were released in Tay Ninh Province.

(4) Unit 3A (designated Unit 26 prior to April 1968): established pre-Tet 1968 as a detention facility for foreign military and civilian POWs. As of 2 April 1970, this unit detained seven U.S. POWs. One unidentified Caucasion U.S. POW died from malignant malaria in October 1969. Unit Strength: 25 personnel.

(5) Unit 4A: established pre-Tet 1968 to detain foreign military deserters. Unit 4A was located with the Inter-Unit A Headquarters. As of 2 April 1970, only one U.S. deserter was detained at this facility. The deserter was positively identified by [redacted] from a photograph as McKinley [redacted] Noland, a negro, was at the camp with his half Vietnamese/half Cambodian wife and her two children by previous marriages, one a 13-year-old boy sired by a Cambodian father and the other a 3-year-old girl sired by a Korean. According to Source, Noland had been involved in black market activities in Saigon and had been caught by either U.S. military police or GVN National Police, resisted arrest, allegedly killed the policeman, escaped, hid and continued his black market activities in the Saigon area. Later he met his wife who reportedly convinced him to flee into Cambodia to live. Noland and his family were picked up by the VC and turned over to Unit 4A where he was detained with relative freedom of movement between at least April 1968 and April 1970. On several occasions, PDV indoctrinators met with Noland at the Inter-Unit A Headquarters for unknown reasons. His degree of cooperation with the VC was never revealed, although he did volunteer his stepson as an office boy for Inter-Unit A and was allowed occasionally to cut wood for the Inter-Unit A Headquarters nearby under guard. In 1969 Noland allegedly requested to be set free with his family in Cambodia, but no action was taken. Unit Strength: 10 personnel.

B. Inter-Unit B: established in May 1968 in the Xom Giua area, Cambodia, opposite Tay Ninh Province. The Inter-Unit B Headquarters was composed of 25 personnel headed by Senior Captain (fnu) D a u. Inter-Unit B supervised three POW detention camps for ARVN POWs from enlisted to officer ranks. Only one ARVN second lieutenant, (fnu) X u a n, was identified by name. The three subordinate POW camps were designated Unit 1B, 2B and 3B, which were each staffed by about 25 personnel. An unknown number of ARVN POWs were

detained at these camps.

C. Inter-Unit C, established in May 1968 in an undetermined area for the detention of foreign military and civilian POWs, in a total of three subordinate camps. Each was staffed by about 25 personnel and there were about 15 to 25 personnel at the Inter-Unit C Headquarters.

6. Between March and early April 1970, the above-mentioned POW detention facility system was reorganized because the anticipated receipt of large numbers of ARVN/Allied POWs had never materialized after Tet 1968; VC military activities had been toned down and the VC were in need of qualified cadres and enlisted personnel to fill vacancies in combat units. Upon instructions from the SVNLA Political Staff, the PDV streamlined its organization in the following manner:

A. Inter-Unit A was reorganized into two U.S./foreign POW detention facilities. Unit 1A was kept intact, while the Inter-Unit A Headquarters and its four other subordinate elements were disbanded and formed into one detention unit (designation unknown) headed by Junior Captain Le H u e, aka Ut, H u e, formerly the Deputy Chief of Inter-Unit A. Following the reorganization, the two units were directly subordinate to the PDV Policy Office. Each unit was composed of about 25 to 30 personnel, while the remaining personnel were sent to replacement Unit C620 before reassignment to combat or other units.

B. Inter-Unit B was disbanded and formed into one ARVN POW detention facility directly subordinate to the PDV Policy Office with about 25 to 35 personnel. Unit designation and location unknown.

C. Inter-Unit C was disbanded and formed into at least one and possibly two U.S./foreign POW detention facilities directly subordinate to the PDV Policy Office with about 25 to 35 personnel. Unit designation and location unknown.

7. Between April 1968 and April 1970, PDV Propaganda Section personnel were observed on several occasions frequenting the above mentioned Inter-Unit A POW detention facilities. Section personnel, such as Junior Captain Duy, H o a, aka Ba, H o a, had direct access to POWs. Hoa conducted indoctrination sessions designed to convince the POWs of the heroism and determination of the Vietnamese people in their struggle for independence from foreign domination. POWs were required to read books, documents and pamphlets on Vietnamese history and on the reconstruction of North Vietnam (NVN). According to Hoa, such reading materials were not as effective as oral group discussions. Hoa presents topics for discussions in which the POWs were required to participate actively. Such discussions were presented in question-and-answer form, with Hoa guiding the POWs to the type of answers he wanted. For example, discussion topics dealt with the comparison of VC and ARVN treatment of POWs; North Vietnamese assistance to the VC in SVN; and the U.S. presence in SVN as aggressors. POWs were guided to conclude that the VC used no form of torture against POWs while the ARVN did; that the NVN presence in SVN was as Vietnamese helping Vietnamese in a brotherly fashion since there was only one Vietnam and not two Vietnams; and that the U.S. was the strongest military power in SVN interferring with the internal politics of the Vietnamese people and hence was the aggressor, not NVN. After group discussions the POWs were required to write a statement, based on the questions and answers, admitting that the U.S. was the aggressor in the war. According to Hoa, the statements were later studied at the PDV and were used to develop indoctrination materials, including leaflets. Statements were sent to Hanoi and were used to assist in the indoctrination of U.S. POWs in NVN. Consequently, the PDV throu

to detain a number of U.S. POWs in SVN in order to gain more experience in proselyting efforts and believed that U.S. POWs were valuable in its enemy proselyting operations and later in bargaining for the exchange of high-ranking VC cadres held by the GVN. A secondary function of the PDV Propaganda Section was to conduct political reorientation courses for its own subordinate cadres and personnel.

8. PDV indoctrinators in the Enemy Situation Section were responsible for interrogating U.S./ARVN POWs for information on the history, morale, and biographic background of division-level units and their commanders, as well as the identification and number of unit personnel who opposed the war, refused to take part in military operations or deserted their units. Attention was also given to the degree of racism/segregation in U.S. units and the relationship between enlisted personnel and officers. Special emphasis was placed on identifying the psychological, morale and ideological status of key enemy unit commanders as well as the effectiveness of their units during combat against VC/NVA forces. Such information was provided to SVNLA campaign planners. The Enemy Situation Section was composed of about 10 personnel headed by Senior Captain (fnu) Hai C.a.

9. Based on the results of indoctrination and interrogation sessions by the Propaganda and Enemy Situation Sections, further research was conducted by the In-Combat Proselyting Section headed by Senior Captain (fnu) Tu S e n. This Section took the debriefing results and drew up enemy proselyting programs which were to be used during VC/NVA combat operations. Proselyting programs were keyed to specific VC/NVA combat tactics, and were designed to support tactical operations be it a major campaign, small-scale hit-and-run attack or an ambush. These proselyting programs were also sent to the SVNLA campaign planners for their review and use in planning combat actions against enemy military forces.

10. Although the PDV did not have per se an Administrative Staff Section, all PDV administrative personnel affairs were handled by the PDV Cadre Section, which kept all personnel records. The Cadre Section was responsible for personnel assignments and processed recommendations for promotions, awards and disciplinary action.

11. The PDV was also responsible for drawing up and disseminating instructions and regulations concerning the treatment, evacuation and release of POWs who were brought to, and detained by, the PDV. Upon capture each POW was given a bilingual letter of instruction on how the POW was to act during the period he was being escorted to the next higher echelon. POWs were instructed to march fast, camouflage themselves with tree branches when enemy aircraft appeared and do nothing to signal circling aircraft, willingly submit to being blindfolded when instructed, and ask the permission of the armed escorts to toilet. Upon arrival at the PDV detention camp location, POWs were given the following instructions: do not attempt to reveal the camp location; do not make smoke from cooking fires during daylight hours or allow any light to show at night; do not dry clothes in the sun; ask permission to toilet; do not reveal to fellow POWs the subject of interrogations at the facility; report any attempts of others to resist captivity; eat all food immediately and do not build up food reserves; do not attempt to escape. Any POW caught trying to escape was tied to a tree overnight and given only rice to eat for three days in view of other POWs. If a POW overpowered and killed an armed guard the maximum penalty was death.

12. At Unit 23A of Inter-Unit A, all personal belongings, such as military clothing and equipment, money and jewelry were taken from the POWs and not given back until their release. Civilian foreigners were allowed to wear their civilian clothes. Upon arrival at the

detention camp each POW was issued a hammock, a mosquito net, a blanket, a pair of sandals, a tooth brush and other items. Each POW was kept separately in an underground trench except during meals, indoctrination, interrogation and toilet when he was with two armed guards. Each trench had a cover which doubled as a floor and was 2-50 meters in circumference by 1.50 meters deep. All POWs were chained by foot to a log in the trench, except for observers or those who had proven sympathetic to the VC. The daily work schedule was as follows: 0545 hours wake up, wash and physical exercise; 0600 breakfast; 0630-0700 required listening to VC/NVN propaganda radio broadcasts in English; 0700-1130 indoctrination/interrogation sessions; 1130 lunch; 1200-1400 siesta; 1400-1700 indoctrination/interrogation sessions; 1700 supper. If the POW was not needed for indoctrination/interrogation sessions he was allowed out of the trench three times a day for one hour maximum each time. Deserters were given permission to remain outside their trench during daylight hours within the prescribed camp limits. Food rations for foreign POWs were 4.50 Cambodian riels per day, 35 liters of rice per month and an undetermined cash allowance for soap, cigarettes and other items. ARVN POWs were allowed 2.0 Cambodian riels per day, 24 liters of rice per month and 15 riels a month allowance for soap, cigarettes and other items. Increased food allowances were given for 22 December (NVA day), 2 September (NVN Independence Day) and during the Tet holidays. After August 1969, the PDV experienced difficulties in obtaining sufficient quantities of rice. The ARVN POW monthly rice allowance was cut from 26 liters to 24 liters, while foreign POW monthly rice allowance remained unchanged. This was done deliberately to keep the fact of rice shortages secret from foreign POWs. On the other hand, PDV rice rations were cut in half--half of the monthly rice allowance was issued in manioc. PDV detention facility personnel were under strict orders not to torture or abuse any POWs; otherwise, disciplinary action would be taken against them. All deaths of foreign POWs were investigated in detail by PDV headquarters personnel. In the case of one death of an unidentified Caucasian POW due to malaria in October 1969, the camp medical technician was severely criticized by the PDV which sent investigators to confirm the cause of death.

13. Although the criteria for releasing POWs were not known to Sources, especially in regard to U.S. POWs, most ARVN enlisted and NCO POWs were usually eligible for release, but not ARVN officers. The PDV Policy Section determined who would be released. The VC psychology behind the release of ARVN POWs was based on the assumption that the released ARVN POW would return to his family and/or unit and spread propaganda favorable to the VC, even if he had not been recruited or dispatched by the VC. Prior to the release of 35 ARVN enlisted and NCO POWs in July/August 1968, Senior Lieutenant (fnu) V i of the SVNLA Political Staff Security Protection Office (Phong Bao Ve (J5)) visited the Unit 23A detention facility for three days and interrogated each of the 35 personnel being considered for release. The interrogations were conducted separately; Sources knew no other details, nor were they able to comment on the involvement of J5 personnel with the January 1969 release of three U.S. POWs in Tay Ninh Province. (Field Comment: The J5 Security Protection Office is responsible for counterespionage and internal security activities within the SVNLA. Its functions are similar to the COSVN Security Section, which is subordinate to the COSVN Current Affairs Committee.)

14. The only other COSVN-level organization which was in contact with POWs at PDV detention facilities was the COSVN Military Proselyting Section (Ban Binh Van). Prior to the July/August 1968 release ceremony for ARVN POWs, two Military Proselyting Section cadres, Chin T h e and (fnu) C h i e n, went to Unit 23A. Chin The interviewed each ARVN POW with a tape recorder and instructed

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each POW to write a letter to his family which he reviewed and corrected before the POW read the letter into the tape recorder. The tape-recorded letters were later broadcast over the National Liberation Front Radio. Chien took a group picture of the POWs with a still camera for unknown reasons. No Military Proselyting Section cadres were identified by Sources in either the motion picture film or still pictures of the January 1969 release of three U.S. POWs in Tay Ninh Province. Neither Source was able to comment on whether personnel of this section were involved in the recruitment and dispatch of released ARVN POWs. The Military Proselyting Section had the responsibility of detaining, indoctrinating and interrogating U.S./Allied/ARVN deserters who rallied to the VC. The PDV sent information copies of all its indoctrination and interrogation reports to the Military Proselyting Section via the SVNLA Political Staff.

15. As each ARVN POW was considered for release, the PDV attempted to recruit the POW into the SVNLA. For a POW to be accepted into the SVNLA he had to be a member of the basic social class (landless/poor farmer), have no relatives working as GVN civil servants or in the ARVN and have been politically indoctrinated by accepting the VC revolutionary cause, and had to submit a handwritten request volunteering to join the SVNLA. The ARVN POW detention units then made up a list of all POWs who met these criteria and submitted a report to the Inter-Unit Headquarters for final approval by an unidentified PDV approving authority. At least ten members of Inter-Unit A were former ARVN POWs recruited in this fashion.

16. Field Dissem: USMACV J-2, USARV G-2, 525 MI Gp, OSI, ( ) b1+b3 NAVFORV N-2, NISOV, CINCPAC, PACFLT, ARPAC, PACAF